

Testimony at CSREES Listening Session
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Bloomington, MN

A Federal-State County Partnership that Works

I am Jayne Hager Dee, County Extension Leader, with University of Minnesota Extension Service, Dakota County. CSREES's programs and funding affect counties directly. In a moment, I will give you some examples of the effects of federal funding in Dakota County.

First, however, I want to tell you a little about the county where we do our work. Dakota County is just over the Minnesota River from where we are right now. It is a growing county with nearly 360,000 people. Ninety-five percent of those people live in the northern 1/3 of the county, the suburban part of Dakota County. The other 5 % live in the rural southern 2/3 of the county. Approximately 10,000 people are added to the county's population and 3,000 acres of farmland are taken out of production annually as the county grows. Dakota County is a quite wealthy county but there are pockets of poverty within our communities. There is also a growing new immigrant population. Eleven percent of our school-age children in the county are children of color.

Extension in Dakota County serves the needs of both rural and suburban citizens. We have approximately 40 employees who conduct education in Dakota County every day. Last year our total operating budget was \$1.9 million; approximately 40% was provided through county levy funds, 30% was University of Minnesota funds (some of these funds are federal pass through funding), 30% is generated through grants and contracts. Our strength is in our strong partnership with the county. Dakota County demands accountability for our programs which forces us to continuously step back and evaluate the programs we conduct and seek out opportunities for new partnerships and innovation that may exist.

Extension's program strengths in our county are the following:

- Horticulture – Dakota County's Master Gardeners were awarded the 2001 International Search for Excellence Award for their work with environmentally friendly lawn and garden information but also assistance with shore land management and composting and their work with youth and citizens with special needs.
- Nutrition, food safety and resource management.
- Youth development – We enroll about 1,400 youth in 4-H community clubs but reach another 25,000 through in-school, after-school and summer youth programming focusing on prevention, citizenship, self-esteem building, life skills training, personal responsibility, problem-solving and enrichment.
- Environmental education – We partner with 3 other Dakota County departments to bring water resources education to county citizens.

- **Family education** – Including parenting education, health information, housing and programs to help new immigrants assimilate into their new life in the Twin Cities.
- **Agriculture** – Our farmers do not need production assistance. They want information that will help them manage risk and market their products for a profit.
- **Volunteer development** – We have a database of over 2,300 Extension volunteers who work with youth, in horticulture outreach, as parent mentors, as water quality monitors and community leaders. Now, these aren't just people that we work with once in awhile. These are our volunteers! If we assume that each volunteer contributes 2 hours per week for Extension, times 52 weeks in a year, at a value of \$15.39 (which the Minnesota Office of Citizenship and Volunteers values volunteer time per hour) per hour – that means that Extension volunteers contribute over \$3.6 million dollars of man and woman-power to further bring Extension programming to the citizens to Dakota County. Now, that's impact!

I want to share with you how 4 specific CSREES-funded programs have benefited programming in Dakota County. First of all, Beth Sandell shared with you how important the federal nutrition "Simply Good Eating" partnership is to our communities in Minnesota. In Dakota County, we employ 7 Nutrition Education Assistants (NEAs) with another NEA being responsible for delivery of EFNEP programs. Thousands of limited resource adults and children benefit in Dakota County alone from this program each year.

Secondly, one of our Extension Educators is on assignment in Germany until spring, 2002 with the USDA/Army School Age and Teen Project. She is teaching sound youth development principles to paraprofessional workers who conduct before and after-school programs on U.S. Army bases in Europe. We see this project, however, as an opportunity to both share Nicole Deprez-Garrity's expertise as a youth educator, and for her to learn about effective models of school-based delivery. Most of our youth programming in Dakota County is school-based. We anticipate that Nicole will be a resource for our county as well as a statewide resource to help us build more successful school-based Extension education. None of this would be possible without USDA's successful partnership with the U.S. Army.

A third example of CSREES's funds helping our county is through the Children, Youth and Families At-Risk (CYFAR) program. In about 1992, Dakota County was awarded funds for an educational program in underserved neighborhoods – manufactured housing parks, federally subsidized apartment complexes and very rural communities – the "On the Move...for Minnesota Families" (OTM) program. Included in the funding was the leasing of a recreational vehicle that was converted into a mobile classroom. Picture, if you will, a camper driving into an apartment complex, kids and caregivers running out of their units for age appropriate educational activities and, in partnership with other service providers, educational opportunities for the parents/caregivers. In partnership with 68 other organizations, OTM is providing weekly or bi-weekly learning opportunities in 29 communities. Extension is reaching people where they live. When the CYFAR grant expired, the Dakota County Board of Commissioners agreed to

continue the program and purchased the vehicle. They had seen the success of the program and wanted to be sure it continued in these select communities. In fact, for the past 2 summers, we have been partnering with the Dakota County Libraries Bookmobile. The two vehicles visit the same sites each week and compliment one another's interests. In 2001, it is estimated that OTM will reach approximately 10,000 clients and will engage nearly 800 volunteers. Without the infusion of CSREES funds to initially develop the OTM program, it would not exist today in Dakota County.

My fourth example is about how CSREES assisted Extension as we responded to a heavy rain incident in the communities of Apple Valley, Burnsville, Eagan and Rosemount. On July 7 and 8, 2000, over 12 inches of rain fell in those communities. Basements were flooded, and worse, basements were blown out from the force of the raging water. Tremendous property losses were incurred, families were uprooted, treasures were lost and families suffered an emotional toll. This happened on Friday and Saturday nights. By noon on Monday, in coordination with Dakota County Emergency Management, Extension had an Internet link to both the South Carolina State University and North Dakota State University websites with clean-up, health, safety and indoor air quality information. Dakota County also highlighted the link on their home page. By 4:00 that afternoon, 1,700 packets of clean-up information were printed, ready to be delivered to lumber yards and hardware stores in the flood area and for the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) meeting that would take place the next evening. Without the Extension network that is available to states as a national system – brought together by CSREES – we would not have been able to bring research-based, factual clean-up information to families in need. The wealth of information that is available system-wide made Extension a major player in Dakota County's response to its citizens. With Dakota County as our partner, we were able to respond quickly and accurately to an emergency situation through print materials and via the electronic media in the Twin Cities market.

CSREES has brought a lot to Dakota County's Extension program. Funds have allowed us to leverage salaries. The national network of state Extension Services allows us to access information quickly and with confidence that it is accurate and research-based. CSREES, through its program leadership, offers issues education leadership – that big-picture, national view of issues that we sometimes don't see in our own state or communities. Programs are designed and innovated on the national level in response to issues that can be adjusted to meet local needs. CSREES also strengthens the Extension linkage with research. It's that research link that makes Extension different from most other educational organizations and that gives this organization the reputation of being unbiased and factual.

I thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts with you today. Extension is working in Dakota County, Minnesota. It is because of the federal-state-county partnership. If each of us commits to continuing this partnership, University of Minnesota Extension Service will continue to connect community needs and University resources to benefit the people of this state.